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SIPDIS
SENSITIVE

STATE FOR AF/W, AF/RSA, DRL/AE AND INR/AA
PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHER

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TAGS: [ELAB](#) [SOCI](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [KDEM](#) [ECON](#) [SG](#)
SUBJECT: SENEGAL'S UNIONS PREPARING MULTIPLE STRIKES

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Fed up with President Abdoulaye Wade's confrontational attitude and refusal to communicate, Senegal's major unions are getting ready to strike. The country's main unions are preparing to hold a general strike, while teacher's unions have just announced that they will strike for nine days effectively wiping out the 2008 scholastic year. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) During a meeting of the Central Committee of Senegal's most powerful union, the National Senegalese Workers Union (CNTS), to which Poloff was granted access, its leaders gave CNTS chairman Modi Guiro carte blanche to call a general strike whenever he deemed it appropriate. During the lively discussion characterized by passionate speeches, union leaders pledged their support and all blamed President Wade for his inability to manage the country's fragile economy and attacked his intransigent attitude towards an olive branch that Guiro tended to him during a May 1 International Labor Day speech: "it's a disgrace, he slapped us away with the back of his hand like we were children" said one indignant leader.

13. (SBU) In a pull-aside after the meeting Guiro was adamant that the strike would be held sometime in May and that the country would be brought to a standstill. In an answer to a question about the timing of a strike, Guiro answered that only a show of force could bring Wade to the negotiating table: "he has rejected every one of our demands. I doubt he even read them. We have to take the fight to streets and then maybe he'll respond." Guiro envisages a one day strike as a warning to gauge Wade's reactions. If nothing comes of it, he emphasized that they were prepared to escalate "until the end." If these strikes are going to be successful it will be vital for Guiro and his comrades to enlist the support of groups like cab drivers, truckers, and small-time merchants as well as the powerful teachers unions, UNSAS.

14. (SBU) In a separate meeting with Elimane Diouf, the Vice-President of the Confederation of Autonomous Unions (CSA), Senegal's third most powerful union with representatives in a variety of sectors, Poloff was told that they too were prepared to go on strike and would join up with Guiro's CNTS. Diouf was also critical of Wade's management of the economy, citing in particular the rising prices for daily commodities and high unemployment. In the same vein as many the opposition leaders he singled out the cost of government as the single biggest drain on Senegal's budget. Diouf argued that Wade needed to cut the number of Ministries by half and get rid of all national agencies linked to the Presidency.

15. (SBU) In response, Presidential Advisor Boubabcar Ba dismissed the unions as being under the control of Wade's political rivals and said that all they wanted was more money. He was particularly critical of the teachers unions, who have been striking on and off since October 2007 and are now threatening a nine-day strike that would effectively render the 2008 scholastic year null and void ("annee blanche"), saying that since Wade came to power their indemnities have quintupled and that they were trying to get the most they could before he leaves power. Note: Wade's presidential term is scheduled run until 2012. End note.

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16. (SBU) In listening to the union leaders, it seems as if their problems with Wade have become personal as they feel that he is totally dismissive of their demands. Wade, for his part, feels that he is on the right track with new projects to address the country's economic problems and is accusing opposition leaders of using unions of fomenting troubles for political gain. Under the current circumstances it is unlikely that there will be a negotiated settlement between Wade and the unions and it will remain to be seen if the unions can truly carry out mass protests and create a groundswell of opposition. Previous calls from union leaders for open-ended strikes were short-lived as Wade offered some concessions on demands and, if rumors are true, some financial benefits to union leaders.

SMITH